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73rd plenary meeting
Tuesday, 2 March 2010, 12 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki ..... (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

The meeting was called to order at 12.15 p.m.

Earthquake in Chile

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express, on my own behalf and on behalf of all the States members of the General Assembly, our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Chile for the tragic loss of life and material damage that have resulted from the recent earthquake. May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity with Chile and respond promptly and generously to any request for help.

I propose that the Secretariat send a letter of sympathy and solidarity to the Chile through Her Excellency the President of Chile.

Agenda item 62 (*continued*)

Advancement of women

Commemorative meeting to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Representatives will recall that at its 2nd meeting, on 18 September 2009, the General Assembly allocated item 62 to the Third Committee. In order for the General Assembly to proceed expeditiously on this item, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to consider this item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): May I further take it that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to the consideration of agenda item 62?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with decision 64/530 of 18 December 2009, the General Assembly will now hold the commemorative meeting to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We have gathered here today to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and to renew our commitment to the full and accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represents a milestone in the advancement of women's rights. Fifteen years ago, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing moved the global agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women into the twenty-first century. The Beijing Declaration consolidated five decades of legal and policy advances aimed at securing equality of women in law and in practice. The Platform for Action expanded and deepened previous political agreements and charted a results-oriented way forward. Through these measures, the Beijing Conference built on the rights, gains and new opportunities that women throughout the world had worked hard to acquire.

Since Beijing, much has changed for the better for the world's women and girls, but new challenges

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have also arisen. The recent economic and financial crisis, the food crisis and the challenges of climate change are having an often disproportionate impact on women. We need to ensure that women can benefit equally from recovery measures on an equal footing with men. The scourge of violence against women remains pervasive, both in times of peace and in situations of conflict. I commend the Secretary-General for launching a global, multi-year campaign called "UNiTE to End Violence against Women", and I join him in his call for urgent and committed action. Ending violence against women is our shared responsibility.

The Assembly has increasingly recognized the impact of gender differences in many areas of the Organization's work. This fall, the high-level plenary meeting on the Millennium Development Goals will be a test case of our commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. Without progress in gender equality, there can be only limited progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The 15 years since the Beijing Conference have seen considerable advances in gender equality and the empowerment of women, but many challenges remain. Let us recommit ourselves to the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the national level and make this a better and more equal world for all women and girls.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Before beginning my remarks, I would like to first offer my sincerest condolences to the Government and people of Chile for the tragic loss and devastation caused by the earthquake last weekend. The United Nations family stands ready to assist in whatever way we can. Our thoughts and prayers are in a special way with those families bereaved.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental to our Organization. I am honoured to address the Assembly today on this important topic. The Charter of the United Nations affirms the principle of equality between women and men. Since its founding, the United Nations has helped to shape political discourse and to establish international norms, goals, policies, strategies and programmes to promote the rights and empowerment of women and girls worldwide.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and which we commemorate this afternoon, is at the heart of this normative and policy framework. The Beijing Conference was one of the most participatory and inclusive conferences in United Nations history. We witnessed an unprecedented mobilization of policymakers, women's groups and academics.

The influence and passion of the women's movement helped define the agenda. Almost 30,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the NGO forum. The involvement of so many stakeholders gave enormous legitimacy and force to the Platform for Action and its call for action in 12 critical areas of concern.

Fifteen years on, we must assess how far we have come. We can learn from the developing and developed countries that have made significant progress in areas such as education, participation in decision-making, maternal health and ending violence against women. There are many good and promising practices to build on, from legislative change, policy development and capacity-building to sector-specific initiatives and efforts to improve data collection. The challenge is to expand and apply such practices more systematically, replicate them wherever possible and use them as the basis for better policies and programmes.

We also need to be self-critical. We need to acknowledge and address the many shortfalls and challenges. We need to close the gap between law, policy and aspiration on the one hand, and the daily realities of billions of women and girls on the other.

From Bangkok to Banjul, the regional review meetings have highlighted where we need to intensify all our efforts. We need to promote women's economic empowerment, including by increasing women's access to economic and financial resources and social protection systems. We need to increase women's participation in all areas of decision-making, repeal laws and eradicate discriminatory policies and practices. Sensitivity to gender must feature in policymaking, budgeting and data collection. Women need better access to health services, including reproductive health, and we must eliminate violence against women and girls. This is the most common, most shameful and least punished crime in the world.

In the past 15 years, understanding has grown that the empowerment of women and girls is not just a

goal in itself, but is key to all our international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The impact of recent multiple global crises on women and girls has further heightened this understanding. We must therefore rethink past policies and strategies for growth and development.

Let me turn now to the central role of the General Assembly itself in promoting women's empowerment. In 1979, the Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2000, a special session of the Assembly adopted a political declaration (resolution S-23/2) building on the Beijing Declaration, and over the years the Assembly's resolutions on women in development and violence against women have been groundbreaking.

This year, the Assembly is working to realize a long-held dream — the establishment of a composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women. A new and well-funded gender entity will allow the United Nations system to better support Member States to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The Secretary-General and I are encouraged by the Assembly's strong support and urge it to move swiftly.

We are all determined to finish the task set out in Beijing. At this session, throughout the year and at the Millennium Development Goals summit in September, let our actions be guided by the principle of equality between women and men as outlined in the Charter. Let us achieve development and peace for all women and girls everywhere. The Secretary-General and I will continue to assist the Assembly in this endeavour.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Equatorial Guinea, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea): Upon taking the floor on behalf of the African Group to mark the 15 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, allow me to reiterate the condolences and solidarity of the African Group to the Government and people of Haiti and Chile for the tragedies caused by the devastating effects of the earthquakes that took place in those countries.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a landmark document, and Africa in particular played a critical role in its formulation. We wish to acknowledge the Honourable Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, a daughter of Africa, for her role in steering the Fourth World Conference on Women to its successful conclusion.

As we commemorate the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we need to recognize that it represents the culmination of the efforts to promote equality for women that we started at the United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico and followed through in Copenhagen and Nairobi. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is our blueprint for action. We should preserve the consensus and commitments we achieved in Beijing.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes that gender equality and the empowerment of women are key to development, peace and human rights — the pillars upon which the United Nations stands. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action further recognized that women are full and equal partners; that it is imperative that gender be mainstreamed in all policies and programmes, not only in our countries, but also throughout the entire United Nations system; and that women have to be at the centre of all decision-making processes. We thus need to accelerate our efforts. It is now time to turn commitments into action so that gender equality and women's empowerment become realities.

Since Beijing, Africa has made great strides in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. At this juncture, I wish to underscore the contribution of African women to development. African women are known for their resilience and for shaping the destiny of their families through their unwavering determination, hard work and creativity. However, despite the progress and women's contribution, constraints and challenges remain in fully realizing the objectives of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Africa has therefore declared the years 2010 to 2020 as the Decade for African Women. We invite the United Nations family and the international community to work with us to make the African Union women's decade a success.

In recognizing that we have to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, Africa now has in place the

Banjul Declaration on the Strategies for the Acceleration of the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. The Declaration has seven strategic areas on which to focus action. They are the economic empowerment of women through poverty reduction, employment creation, social protection and information and telecommunications technologies; peace, security and development; violence against women; the representation and participation of women in all areas of decision-making; sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; climate change and food insecurity; and financing for gender equality.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals. It is therefore imperative that the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action contribute to the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council and its theme of implementing internationally agreed goals and commitments with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women, to be held in July 2010, and to the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly that will focus on accelerating progress towards the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, to be held from 20 to 22 September 2010.

In conclusion, the African Group reiterates its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. While national Governments have the primary responsibility for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, international cooperation is needed to support national efforts in that endeavour. We therefore call for concerted efforts to fully realize gender equality and the full empowerment of women in all political, social, economic and cultural spheres.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): First of all, let me express the condolences of the Asian Group to the people and Government of Chile and all those who suffered during the recent devastating earthquake.

On behalf of the Asian Group, it is an honour for me to address this historic gathering to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration. In September 1995, we gathered in Beijing for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Today, 15 years later, we come together again to commemorate the occasion, acknowledge the progress made and the challenges ahead, and pay tribute to the ideals embodied in the Beijing Platform for Action.

In Beijing, we unequivocally declared our shared determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere, in the interest of all humankind. We recognized the persistent inequalities between men and women and the repercussions they have on societies, and we acknowledged that the situation was exacerbated by the abject poverty that affects the lives of many of the world's people, in particular woman and children. We concluded by dedicating ourselves to addressing those constraints and obstacles. Perhaps more important, we recognized the urgency of that endeavour and the need for collective determination and cooperation in the tasks ahead.

In assessing our progress in implementing the commitments we made to the world's women in Beijing, we realize that much progress has been made but that considerable obstacles remain that hobble and dehumanize women throughout the world. Women's rights are progressive and evolving. Since the Beijing Conference, men and women throughout the world have become ever more aware of the inequities that women endure, and they have spoken up to demand change. It is that demand that has brought about improved recognition of women's rights in each country's legal system and here at the United Nations.

Furthermore, the Beijing Conference cemented the notion that it is unacceptable to differentiate between women's rights and human rights. But still, in many countries around the world, women are not safe from the threats of domestic violence, continued discrimination and wide-ranging socio-economic barriers. We must continue our efforts towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

But progress has been made through the concerted efforts of the international community and national Governments, and in part through the action of women and girls themselves. According to the World Bank, for the first time, women in South Asia now live longer than men. That improvement in women's

longevity is an indicator of better treatment of women and girls and a valued outcome identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, high economic growth has led to a significant reduction in gender gaps in the labour markets of Asian and Pacific nations.

In the political realm, Asia, where women political leaders are more prevalent than anywhere else, has certainly made progress through the introduction of quota systems to increase women's representation in political governance structures. For example, in my country of Afghanistan, where the misogynistic Taliban once ruled and women were deprived of their very basic human rights, constitutional law now stipulates that 27 per cent of all seats in Parliament must be filled by women.

Undoubtedly, because of our actions over the past three decades, women's issues have gained prominence on the international and national development agendas. Attention has gone not only to the plight of poor and disenfranchised women in developing countries, but also to the unfinished gender agenda in more developed countries, such as addressing women's representation in higher-paying jobs and management positions and reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence.

We gather here today to commemorate this special occasion and to celebrate a cause and the progress made. But, more important, we are here to realize that our job is not finished and that there are new and existing challenges. We have come a long way since the Conference in Beijing. We shall be ruthlessly unyielding in our pursuit of ensuring that our mothers, our sisters and our daughters are treated with equality, respect and dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): Today, our hearts and thoughts are with our Chilean friends who lost relatives and shelter. We express our deep sympathy to the Government of Chile and to the nation as a whole.

It is a particular honour for me to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women. This General Assembly commemorative event gives us an ideal opportunity to assess how far Member States have come in fulfilling their promises to address the shortcomings, face new challenges and reaffirm their commitments to fairness, justice, health and opportunities for the whole human race.

Members of the Eastern European Group reaffirm their commitments to the Beijing documents, which constitute an overarching policy framework, and attach particular significance to their effective implementation. We consider gender equality, gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women to be not only important objectives, but also means for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and an essential part of the development agenda.

Undoubtedly, there has been progress in implementing the Beijing outcomes. Violence against women is now illegal almost everywhere. In many countries, new health strategies have saved thousands of women's lives. A record number of women have become leaders and decision-makers, in particular here at the United Nations. There has been worldwide mobilization against female genital mutilation and cutting, as well as violence and killings in the name of honour and other harmful practices. Above all, more countries have come to understand that women's equality is a prerequisite for development.

Much has been accomplished, but much remains to be achieved. Women and girls still face multiple forms of discrimination, which are often the result of laws, policies, customs and practices that restrict women's opportunities to participate fully in development processes and in public, political and private life.

As we review the Platform for Action, we would like to emphasize that when we speak of the empowerment of women we should address the feminization of poverty, violence against women — physical, psychological or sexual; at home, on the street or in situations of armed conflict — and the trafficking of women and girls.

Women's health rights remain curtailed by poor access to health care, while maternal and infant mortality remain unacceptably high in many countries. There are very few effective programmes to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic among women in many parts of the world, especially in Africa.

Women's representation remains low in political and economic life; in general, it remains marginal in

public and private sector employment. Women are very poorly represented at higher levels of decision-making, preventive diplomacy, conflict-resolution negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction. Perhaps the most insidious barrier to women's equal participation in leadership roles is the persistence of stereotypes of women, which perpetuate discrimination and entrenched prejudices.

These challenges can be met only if we enable women to build on the best this world has to offer, rather than condemn them to suffer the worst of it. That means, above all, that women must be educated and enabled to play their part in the global economy and in the lives of their families, communities and States.

The Eastern European Group thanks the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General for their leadership and crucial support for gender reform and the promotion of the Beijing agenda. We recognize the vital importance of a strengthened United Nations gender architecture in advancing women's rights, and believe that the new entity will bring an important shift to the work of the United Nations in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is also imperative to involve all actors in the implementation of the gender agenda: men and women in general, Governments, parliaments and civil society, including the private sector, social partners, non-governmental organizations and international, regional, national and local institutions. We must all work together in a global partnership, bringing our skills and resources together to achieve our common purpose.

It has been said that women hold up half the sky. Let us not forget that there are still a great number of things for women to do here on the ground. They manufacture textiles and computers, give birth to children and raise them; write books, cultivate the land, govern people's lives, support our families, and invest for the future. Let us, together, help them. Let us strive to live up to the expectations of billions of women throughout the world. Let us offer a clear vision for the future and bold ideas that will help ensure a future brighter, kinder, more peaceful and prosperous for all — a future in which women are healthy and educated, free from violence, have a chance to live, work and enjoy life as full and equal partners in society, and in which their children, their families and their communities flourish.

We need strong political will, abundant energy and extraordinary spirit to move it forward and demonstrate that empowering women means better lives not only for women, but for everyone on the planet — men and women alike.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Panama, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Harris (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, whose members have requested that I convey to the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women our sincerest congratulations on his appointment. We are confident that his leadership will guarantee the greatest success for the work of the Commission's fifty-fourth session.

In the same capacity, my delegation has the honour to express its solidarity with and condolences to the people and Government of the Republic of Chile and regrets the loss of lives as a result of the strong earthquake that affected southern Chile, causing hundreds of deaths, leaving thousands homeless and causing extremely serious material damage.

Today we commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the global framework for gender equality, the human rights of women and the empowerment of women and girls. On this occasion, Member States will have the opportunity to share their experiences and good practices with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States thanks the Secretary-General for all the reports prepared in the context of this meeting, and in particular that on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, published as document E/CN.6/2010/2*.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States also thanks the Division for Gender Affairs of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean for preparing document LC/L.3175, entitled "Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome

of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in Latin American and Caribbean Countries". This document reflects the progress, achievements and challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 15 years since the adoption of the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

As we face the future, there remain many unresolved issues with respect to the advancement of women and achieving gender equality. The lack of technical and financial resources is a persistent obstacle. Among other things, it is necessary to increase commitment and political will to implement actions, to prioritize gender mechanisms at the highest level of the State, to increase and more broadly distribute relevant budgets, and to create systems of accountability that allow for ongoing monitoring of how countries are fulfilling their commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action.

The members of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States are ready to work constructively to ensure the success of the new review process and the effectiveness of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Germany, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. Kues (Germany): It is my particular honour today to address the General Assembly on behalf of Group of Western European and Others States as we gather on the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Fifteen years is a long time. Members of the young generation who were born in the 1990s may wonder why we still assemble to commemorate a document adopted at a diplomatic conference held one and a half decades ago. They may ask why they should still care about an action plan that is 15 years old. So what will we tell them?

We can point out to them that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is still the only universally agreed basis for concrete action for the betterment of the lives of women around the world. We can recall that it was worked out in a long and arduous negotiation process that included regional preparatory conferences which addressed the needs and concerns of women in the different regions of the world in a very specific way — namely, their own. We can tell them that it was done with the full participation of non-governmental organizations, and we can assure them that for all these reasons the importance of Beijing remains unsurpassed.

The World Conference put gender issues at the top of the political agenda once and for all. The Conference and the implementation process ever since — in our countries, in regional and other organizations, and in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women — have sparked enormous political interest in these issues. Beijing mobilized international organizations, national Governments, local authorities and non-governmental organizations on an unprecedented scale. And the follow-up process to Beijing has sustained that interest until this very day.

But let us also be honest with them. We must admit that many of the goals defined in the Platform as critical areas of concern remain unattained in many places. Many of the hopes and promises underlying the Platform remain unfulfilled. Action as agreed in Beijing is still urgently needed everywhere.

More needs to be done to enable women and men to share responsibilities and to balance work, family and private life during the whole lifecycle. Today, many new elements in women's lifecycles — such as longer life expectancy, a greater variety of vocational and career stages, changed patterns in raising children and care of the elderly — entail major changes in their living arrangements. Equality policy must strive to create the adequate social, economic and political framework to accommodate these changes.

More needs to be done to create access to health services for women and to give women and girls equal access to education and vocational training. More needs to be done to enable women worldwide to participate fully in political and economic life and to achieve economic independence. And more needs to be done to encourage men to choose new role models.

Last but not least, more needs to be done to combat and prevent the many forms of violence against women and girls, to empower and protect women during and after armed conflict, and to contribute to the prosecution of perpetrators. From today's point of view, we could add that the full and effective implementation of the Beijing documents will also be essential if we want to find sustainable answers to such

global challenges as the economic, financial and food crises and climate change.

That is why the countries of the Western European and Others Group see this event today as more than just a festive commemoration. We see this event first of all as an opportunity to underline once again our own full commitment to the outcomes of the Conference. And we find it, therefore, more than fitting that the General Assembly itself should also reconfirm once again the value and importance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Both texts must continue to guide us in our future work at all levels and in all regions.

One level at which much of the action required can be induced and coordinated is, of course, the United Nations. Here, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women plays an important role as it deals with many of the issues raised in Beijing from a human rights perspective. We also saw the Security Council step in and adopt an important text on the empowerment of women a decade ago, namely, resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

In implementing all these decisions, big challenges remain for the Organization's membership and the United Nations system. But there is one issue where real progress seems to be at hand. Proposals to reform the internal gender architecture of the United Nations are on the table and, if we were to agree on them quickly at the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, we could give a real boost to the Beijing agenda and the empowerment of women.

I hope that in the coming days the Commission will prepare the grounds for the future implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Conference. Let us continue to take Beijing as what it promised to be — our platform for action.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Frank (United States of America): Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the honour of speaking here today on behalf of the host country and also as one of the only women taking the floor today with the Deputy Secretary-General. It is a great honour.

The United States applauds the progress made to improve the status of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women. We recognize, however, that there are significant obstacles to progress. We welcome the opportunity to highlight some of those challenges. Some obstacles to the well-being of women and girls, including poverty, lack of education and maternal and child health, remain to this day, but new challenges have arisen, such as efforts to exploit persons through human trafficking, rising rates of HIV/AIDS and rape as a weapon of war.

A priority of the Obama Administration is to advance maternal and child health. Each year, over half a million women die in childbirth because of complications for which effective and low-cost treatments exist. The United States Government has partnered with Member States, non-governmental organizations and others to reduce the number of maternal deaths. We have now lowered the maternal mortality rate by 30 to 50 per cent in several Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries. To further improve those results, Governments need to increase women's access to skilled birth attendants who can address the complications of pregnancies and ensure that sufficient drugs and other necessary supplies are available to prevent and treat obstetric complications.

Progress has also been made in increasing access to education. The ratio of girls to boys in schools has increased, but girls often drop out of school because they are forced to marry early or because they must work to support their families. Our task is to address the factors that prevent girls from completing their education.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that de facto and de jure discrimination against women must end. As women continue to lack access to control over resources, it is essential to enact and enforce laws that guarantee women's rights to own and to inherit land and property. The United Nations has adopted resolutions that address this topic, including a 2005 resolution of the former Commission on Human Rights. A mechanism is needed to examine discriminatory laws against women from a multidisciplinary perspective and to provide technical assistance to Member States to address the issue. The consensus adoption by the Human Rights Council at its September 2009 session of resolution 12/17 on the elimination of discrimination against women was an important first step in that regard. The United States

hopes that efforts will continue and result in the creation of a new mechanism.

While rape in conflict situations is hardly a new phenomenon, Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1880 (2009), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) have called attention to the particularly egregious situation of systematic rape and the use of military force in order to advance military and political objectives. Those resolutions emphasize that Governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens. When Governments become perpetrators rather than protectors, their citizens have no recourse within their own country.

We welcome the appointment of Margot Wallström as Special Representative of the Secretary-General to coordinate efforts to end sexual violence in armed conflict situations. We also appreciate the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme to deploy teams of experts to help Governments to take measures to end sexual violence in conflict-related situations, improve accountability and end impunity. A further step needed is to increase the number of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. The inclusion of women in security forces inspires confidence among the women whom they serve and encourages victims to report sexual and gender-based crimes.

The issue of HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects women and girls. HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death of women aged 15 to 44 worldwide, and gender-based violence is a major cause of increased risk of HIV infection. With its prevention, treatment and care programmes, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is an example of a Government programme that takes a comprehensive approach to gender. It examines a range of issues, including the role of men and boys, the impact of gender-based violence, and the need for integrated health services that allow women comprehensive care that includes services such as family planning, HIV testing and pregnancy care. Moving forward under its new strategy and as part of the President's Global Health Initiative, PEPFAR will increase its investment in programmes that strengthen country-specific gender responses.

At the time of the Beijing Conference, human trafficking was not a widely recognized crime. We now understand that human trafficking affects both individuals and societies. Trafficking not only traumatizes the victims physically and psychologically, but also threatens the public health, strains social services and encourages organized crime. To help those subjected to trafficking, we need to improve their access to victim services in order to ensure that they are able to reintegrate into society. Increased public-private partnerships and a growing focus on corporate social responsibility help boost anti-trafficking capabilities.

In closing, let me reiterate the United States Government's support for reform of the United Nations gender-related institutions. We urge Member States to build on resolution 63/311 and to adopt another General Assembly resolution defining the entity's mandate, staffing and organization, how it will be funded, how it will coordinate with other United Nations bodies and whom it will report to. Although it may take considerable thought to resolve such issues, we must make that effort now. The sooner the unified gender entity is up and running, the sooner all countries will benefit. Developing nations will benefit from technical assistance, which will bring improvements on the ground. All countries will stand to gain from the new entity's efforts to empower women by acting to increase their political participation and by upholding women's rights.

There have been tremendous accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women, but there are still significant challenges ahead. We look forward to working together with Member nations to realize the promise of Beijing.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia, who will speak also in his capacity as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Mr. Nazarian (Armenia) (Chairperson, Commission on the Status of Women): It is a particular privilege for my country, Armenia, to represent the Commission on the Status of Women at the General Assembly. I join all previous speakers in expressing our solidarity with the people and the Government of Chile.

I have the honour to speak in my capacity as the Chair of the Commission at this commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration

and Platform for Action. On behalf of the Commission, I thank the Assembly for convening this commemorative event to confirm the role that the Platform for Action has played and continues to play at all levels for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and to contribute to the momentum towards closing the gap between commitment and action and between policy and implementation.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its 12 critical areas of concern provide clear and concrete guidance on eliminating persistent gender inequalities. In the past 15 years, that landmark document has been the inspiration and blueprint in leading to significant advances for women and girls worldwide. We have cause to celebrate the achievements, but cannot lose sight of the fact that much more remains to be accomplished before the goals of equality, development and peace are truly achieved for all women everywhere. I strongly believe that we are committed to achieving those goals. The time for action is now.

This morning, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a declaration of the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Representatives of Governments reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/S-23/2) and committed to the full and accelerated implementation of those key policy instruments. Governments also recognized the link between the implementation of the Platform for Action and fulfilment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Commission has invited the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, to endorse that declaration, and we look forward to relevant action in due course.

Promising practices exist that can be drawn on, scaled up or replicated in order to move forward the gender equality agenda. We need to galvanize the efforts of all stakeholders towards strategic partnerships, improved collaboration and participatory processes to achieve measurable positive outcomes for women and girls.

2010 is a critical year for gender equality and, as the President has said, there cannot be progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals without progress on gender equality. Let us seize all the opportunities at the national, regional and global levels and give new impetus to the promotion of gender equality and women's enjoyment of their basic human rights.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I now declare concluded the commemorative meeting to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 62?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.